Bṛhatkathā Studies: The Problem of an Ur-text

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LOST texts are common in the history of ancient Indian literature. Many must have perished altogether—even from memory—victim to neglect and hostile insects; a great number survive only as fragments or brief quotations embedded in other works, and sometimes only as titles. One of these lost works is *Bṛhatkathā* ("The Great Romance"). Legend tells us that the poet Guṇāḍhya composed it in Paiśācī, an obscure dialect of Prakrit. Now it exists only as a title; but once, to some commentators, it was a famous and important work. Witness Govardhanācārya's high esteem, for example—"We pay homage to the poets of the Śrī Rāmāyaṇa, the Bhārata, and the Bṛhatkathā," [1] or his remark, "Who would not say Guṇāḍhya is this very same man [Vyāsa] reborn?" [2] Yet, to most scholiasts Guṇāḍhya and his illustrious work are but a memory and a faint one at that.[3] How fortunate it is then that the work has survived, testament to its once great popularity, in several versions: three in Sanskrit, one in Prakrit, and one in Old Tamil.

The most famous of the Sanskrit versions is Somadeva's *Kathāsaritsāgara,*[4] written in Kashmir in the eleventh century and familiar to Western readers from Norman Penzer's copiously annotated edition of the Tawney translation, *The Ocean of Story.*[5] Within a generation of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* and also from Kashmir is Kṣemendra's *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī,*[6] a work that has received no complete translation and very little study. The third Sanskrit version is the *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* of Budhasvāmin, translated by Félix Lacôte[7] and given careful study (along with the Kashmiri versions) by that same scholar in his *Essai sur Guṇāḍhya et la Bṛhatkathā.*[8] Of the two surviving non-Sanskrit versions, the lesser-known is the Old Tamil

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[1] Govardhanācārya, *The Āryā-Saptaśatī of Govardhanāchārya* (ed. by Pandit Durgaprasad & nath Pandurang Parab, *Kāvyamālā 1*, Bombay: Nirnaya Sagara Press, 1886), granthārambhavrajyā, verse 34. (Govardhana lived in the 12th or 13th century.)

[2] Ibid., verse 33.

[3] For a full discussion of ancient notices, see Félix Lacôte, *Essai sûr Guṇāḍhya et la Bṛhatkathā* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1908) [hereafter *Essai*] and my Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1974), "The *Bṛhatkathā:* A Reconstruction from *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha, Peruṅkatai* and *Vasudevahiṃdi,*" pp. 16–57.

[4] *The Kathāsaritsāgara of Somadevabhaṭṭa* (ed. by Pandit Durgaprasad & Kasinath Pandurang Parab; 3rd ed., rev. by Wasudev Laxman Shastri Pansikar, Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1915).

[5] *The Ocean of Story, Being C. H. Tawney's Translation of Somadeva's Kathā Sarit Sāgara* (Reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968).

[6] *The Bṛhatkathāmañjarī of Kshemendra* (ed. by Mahamahopadyaya Pandit Sivadatta & Kashinatha Pandurang Parab, Bombay: Nirnaya Sagara Press, *Kāvyamālā* 69, 1901).

[7] *Bṛhat-Kathā Çlokasaṃgraha* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1908–29). The last 8 chapters of the translation are by Louis Renou (after Lacôte's death).

[8] See footnote 3.

Peruṅkatai of Koṅkuvēḷir,[9] thought to be a rendering of *Bṛhatkathā* but never studied as such.[10] Lacôte knew of the text and discussed its title and chapter names briefly in his *Essai;*[11] but in general the work has been ignored, understandably so if one considers its forbidding length and difficult style. The fifth extant version is Saṃghadāsagaṇin's *Vasudevahiṃḍi,*[12] a Jaina narrative in the popular dialect of Prakrit called Old Jaina Mahārāṣṭrī. Unlike *Peruṅkatai, Vasudevahiṃḍi* has attracted scholarly attention, notably from Ludwig Alsdorf in a number of excellent monographs and articles.[13]

With such a seeming wealth of versions at hand an obvious question comes to mind. Can we reconstruct the lost ur-text that lies behind them all? The answer to this question depends upon the answer to another: Is it appropriate to assume a lost ur-text ever existed? Might not one of the existing "versions" in fact be the real source of the others? After all, those ancient commentators who testify to Guṇāḍhya's existence are surprisingly few and they seem often to have in mind not a Prakrit text (which tradition and scholarship assume Guṇāḍhya's to have been) but some Sanskrit version, perhaps one of those we know. Well, if one of the extant works is the true source of the others, which one? It cannot be either of the Kashmiri volumes. They are fixed late in the eleventh century, later than all other versions. Nor can *Peruṅkatai* be the source, for it too is late, perhaps tenth century as certain grammatical features and its prolix style suggest. Nor, for the same reason, can *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* be the ur-text; it is probably of the eighth or ninth century,[14] later than *Vasudevahiṃḍi.* And, what is the stronger evidence against it—*Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* presents a major part of the story, the life of Udayana,[15] in a highly abbreviated state and could not therefore be the source of versions with a fuller Udayana story (notably *Peruṅkatai,* but also the Kashmiri versions).

We are left then with *Vasudevahiṃḍi* as the only possibility. Indeed, of all extant versions, *Vasudevahiṃḍi* is probably the oldest by far. It is no later than the sixth century, Jacobi believed;[16] while Alsdorf, arguing from its very archaic language, made it much older still, the earliest centuries A.D.[17] And, if that were so, Alsdorf noted, the *Bṛhatkathā* itself must be a product of the last few centuries B.C.,[18] much earlier than most standard literary histories would have it. But, for the same reason as for *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha, Vasudevahiṃḍi* cannot be the "lost" ur-text, for it also has no Udayana story. To derive from *Vasudevahiṃḍi* the other extant versions

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[9] *Koṅkuvēḷir iyaṟṟiya Peruṅkatai* (ed. by U. V. Cāmināṭaiyar; 2nd ed., Ceṉṉai [Madras]: Kēcari Accukkūṭam, 1935).

[10] S. Krishnasvami Aiyangar, "Bṛhat-Kathā," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society,* 1906, pp. 689–92.

[11] *Essai,* pp. 198–99.

[12] *Vasudevahiṇḍiprathamakhaṇḍam,* Ātmānanda-Jaina-Granthamālā, Nos. 80 and 81 (2 vols.; ed. by Caturvijayamuni & Punyavijayamuni, Bhāvnagar: Bhāvnagar Śrījaina-Ātmānanda-Sabhā, 1930–31).

[13] *Harivaṃśapurāṇa. Ein Abschnitt aus der Apabhraṃśa-Welthistorie "Mahāpurāṇa Tisaṭṭhimahāpurisaguṇālaṃkāra" von Puṣpadanta. Als Beitrag zur Kenntniss des Apabhraṃśa und der Universalgeschichte des Jainas* (Hamburg: Friederischen, de Gruyter & Co., Alt- und neu-indische Studien, No. 5, Seminar für Kultur und Geschichte Indiens an der Hansischen Universität, 1936); "Eine neue Version der verlorenen Bṛhatkathā des Guṇāḍhya," in *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti* (Rome, 1935); "The Vasudevahiṇḍi, a Specimen of Archaic Jaina-Mahārāṣṭrī," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies,* VIII, 2/3 (1935–37), pp. 319–33.

[14] *Essai,* p. 147.

[15] King of Kauśāmbī. Udayana is the father of Naravāhanadatta, whose adventures form the heart of most of the works being discussed here.

[16] Hermann Georg Jacobi (ed.), *Sthavīrāvalicarita or Pariśiṣṭaparvan, being an appendix of the Triṣaṣṭi-Śalākāpuruṣacarita* (2nd ed.; Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, Bibliotheca Indica, No. 96, 1932), p. vii; cited by Alsdorf in "The Vasudevahiṇḍi" (n. 13 above), p. 320.

[17] "The Vasudevahiṇḍi" (n. 13 above), p. 320.

[18] "Neue Version" (n. 13 above), p. 345.

one would have to invent a (lost) intermediary[19]—adapted from *Vasudevahiṃḍi* by the addition of Udayana to the story. Then too, one does not expect a Jaina narrative to serve as the *source* of other works. Usually it is the reverse, that Jaina narrative poets are the great *borrowers* from all periods and genres.

All of our versions then are independent of one another, and yet they share so much in common that one must assume a common ancestor. Can we reconstruct this ur-text? A composition of that magnitude must, like the Epics, have influenced subsequent writing in no small measure. To have the ur-text would add much to our knowledge of early Indian literature and to the history of Indian narrative in particular. But can it be recovered? That depends on what is meant by "reconstruction." Reconstruction of *what?* Any literary work, even one composed in what might be to us alien canons of what is literary, has multiple aspects. Literary criticism attempts, in part, to discriminate among the various aspects of literary works; and every school of criticism, whether consciously or not, by the very questions it chooses to ask gives priority to some aspects of works while at the same time ignoring the many other aspects that could also be of interest. So it is important to be clear about which aspect we wish to reconstruct. If, for example, our desire is to reconstruct the *story* of the original, its materials[20] and organization, it is indeed possible to "reconstruct" *Bṛhatkathā.* We have simply to make an inventory of all features shared by the different versions. We are looking for that common component that led us in the first place to "recognize" that these five texts are related as versions of the same ur-text. The more versions that contain a particular element of the story, a particular manner of arranging materials, the more likely that feature belonged to the original.

What do the versions share? All except *Vasudevahiṃḍi* contain a cycle of stories about the illustrious king Udayana, similar in content though varying radically from version to version in size and arrangement—quite abbreviated in *Bṛhatkathā-ślokasaṃgraha,* quite expansive (perhaps expanded) in *Peruṅkatai.* All versions contain the story of Udayana's son, Prince Naravāhanadatta,[21] fated to become emperor of the celestial magicians (Vidyādhara)[22] and to marry a host of women. And all versions that contain both stories link the two in a similar fashion. In the Kashmiri texts the link is rudimentary. In a very brief segue between Udayana's life and his son Naravāhanadatta's story we are told Naravāhanadatta is Śiva's boon to the

[19] Of course, age aside, one can derive all existing versions from any one of them, by positing lost intermediate versions to explain the divergences of any pair of texts. But which missing intermediaries should we posit? All possible intermediaries would be equally possible, since there is no logical way of choosing among them. We would end up with several possible textual pedigrees, each of which explains all data in a totally different (but possible) way, with nothing but literary prejudice to choose among them.

[20] "Materials" in Ronald S. Crane's sense: "everything in the diction of a work or in the things signified by the diction—that is, story (as distinct from plot), environing circumstances, types or signs of character, objects or indexes of emotion, attitudes, conceptions, images, modes of argument, and the like—that can be referred to antecedents other than the writer's formal end and technical skill, whether the antecedents are in real life or in conventions of earlier literature." "Critical and Historical Principles of Literary History" in *The Idea of the Humanities and Other Essays Critical and Historical* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), II, p. 86.

[21] In *Vasudevahiṃḍi* he is called Vasudeva (the Vasudeva who is the father of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa).

[22] Vidyādharas are a class of magicians in possession of (*dhara*) magical techniques (*vidyā*) that endow their possessors with extraordinary abilities such as the power to fly or to take any shape or to make oneself invisible. *Vidyā* are acquired by winning the favor of (*sādhanā, ārādhana*) or by "subduing" (*vāśīkaraṇa*) Vidyās, female godlings who possess and dispense such powers. "Les Vidyādharas ne sont que des hommes, mais ils doivent à leur science magique [*vidyā*] des pouvoirs surnaturels. On ne naît pas Vidyādhara; un homme peut le devenir en acquérant la science 'vidyādharesque' "; *Essai,* p. 22n.

childless Udayana and proceed without further ado into the son's life. In *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* and *Peruṅkatai,* the link is much more elaborate: Naravāhanadatta is the boon of Kubera, not Śiva; and the circumstances of his birth are carefully detailed.

In all versions except *Peruṅkatai,* Naravāhanadatta's life is the central action.[23] It is a life that falls into two periods. First, and dealt with in a rather summary fashion by all versions except the *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha,* are the years from birth to his first marriage (to Madanamañjukā). Then occur two events that serve as a turning point, ushering in the second part of his life and adventures: The hostile Vidyādhara Mānasavega abducts Madanamañjukā, and soon after Naravāhanadatta himself is carried far from his home by that same enemy. What follows are years of exile and wandering which end only when Naravāhanadatta conquers the empire of the Vidyādharas. As to the nature of those adventures, there is variation among the several texts; and the problem is complicated by the fact that not all versions are complete. The broadest area of agreement is among the Sanskrit versions, *Kathāsaritsāgara, Bṛhatkathāmañjarī,* and that part of Naravāhanadatta's story that survives in the *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha.* These portray a series of romantic encounters (usually culminating in marriage), paralleled by Naravāhanadatta's efforts to win the throne of the Vidyādharas. The themes of marriage and martial struggle seem to go hand-in-hand. Fate has decreed that Naravāhanadatta will be emperor of Vidyādharas. But to realize that destiny, he must become a Vidyādhara himself and conquer—with the help of his Vidyādhara allies—those Vidyādharas hostile to his success. By his numerous marriages to Vidyādhara women he gains the magical powers of a Vidyādhara, and the allies too. And by his conquest of the Vidyādhara empire he finally recovers his first love Madanamañjukā, captive of the hostile Vidyādharas throughout the entire period of his odyssey.

In the two other versions, only one or the other of the themes of marriage and conquest is present. In *Peruṅkatai* it is the theme of multiple marriages that is withdrawn, while Naravāhanadatta's political and martial adventures are retained, though in a highly abridged state. This is speculation, however, because *Peruṅkatai* is no longer complete; it breaks off at that point in Naravāhanadatta's story just after Mānasavega abducts him. But evidence within the extant *Peruṅkatai* (dream sequences predicting the career of the son to be born to Udayana and his queen Vāsavadattā), as well as the evidence of two Old Tamil abridgements[24] of the work (which appear to have been made from an intact and complete *Peruṅkatai*), warrant the conclusion that Koṅkuvēḷir abridged Naravāhanadatta's story by removing most of the marriages, leaving a story mainly concerned with Naravāhanadatta's political struggles (and that too probably much shorter than the source Koṅkuvēḷir worked from).

In *Vasudevahiṃḍi,* by contrast, it is the theme of multiple marriages which remains, while Saṃghadāsagaṇin has removed the theme of political conquest from

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[23] I borrow this useful phrase from Crane ("Persuasion" in *The Idea* [n. 20 above], II, p. 296); he uses more or less synonymously the phrases "essential story," "governing conception" (p. 286), "central story" (p. 287), "basic story" (p. 289), "essential internal action" (p. 294).

[24] *Utayaṇa kumāra kāviyam (kuṟippuraiyuṭaṉ)* (ed. by U. V. Cāminātaiyar, Mayilāppur: Ceṉṉai Lācarṇal Accukkūṭam, Kalaimakaḷ Veḷiyīṭu 5, 1935); "Utitōtaya carittiram, Tamiḻ moḻipeyarppu," a manuscript in Tamil, the original of which lies in the U. V. Cāminātaiyar Library, Madras (I give thanks to Pandit Prof. R. Visvanathan, attached to the library, for having the copy made for me).

Vasudeva's adventures. Though there is much material dealing with Vidyādharas, the Vidyādhara world, and the acquisition of *vidyās,* still Vasudeva's adventures are not ultimately connected with Vidyādharas, and it is never stated that Vasudeva will become the Universal Emperor of Vidyādharas. Alsdorf shows why.[25] For Saṃghadāsagaṇin, Vasudeva's story does not stand alone but rather is part of the larger Universal History of the sixty-three *śalākāpuruṣas* (or *mahāpuruṣas*) of Jainism. In particular, it is part of the Kṛṣṇa legend. As a result, Vasudeva cannot be represented as the Universal Emperor (Cakravartin). That role is reserved for a more important participant, Vasudeva's son Kṛṣṇa, in his war against Jarāsaṃdha and in his *digvijaya.* Vasudeva does undertake a campaign against enemy Vidyādharas with the help of grandsons Saṃba and Pajjuṇṇa, but that story appears as part of Kṛṣṇa's war with Jarāsaṃdha and is found only in later versions of the Vasudeva story, not in Saṃghadāsagaṇin's. These other versions seem to hark back to the *Bṛhatkathā,* for in them the various Vidyādharas split into two camps, just as in *Bṛhatkathā,*[26] allying either with Kṛṣṇa or Jarāsaṃdha according to whether they were friends or enemies of Vasudeva during the period of his wandering, his *hiṃḍi.* But the war with Jarāsaṃdha, which contains the war against enemy Vidyādharas, has become only a prelude to Kṛṣṇa's *digvijaya.* It is in Kṛṣṇa's *digvijaya* we find the true counterpart to Naravāhanadatta's *digvijaya,* and it is Kṛṣṇa not Vasudeva who becomes the conqueror. Thus the Vidyādhara campaign of Vasudeva is robbed of its true sense.[27]

In all versions except *Peruṅkatai,* the narrative of Naravāhanadatta's life is organized in the same manner: a succession of *lambha* (or *lābha*), each describing how Naravāhanadatta "acquired" or "won" (*labh*) the wife of the moment and named after that particular heroine: "Gandharvadattā-lambha" for example. In principle, there should be twenty-six *lambhas* since most versions agree that Naravāhanadatta had twenty-six wives. And in principle one expects some sort of progression—moral, allegorical, spatial, or the like—as each version proceeds from *lambha* to *lambha.* But in fact the exact number of *lambhas* and their particular order, the names of the wives and the particular stories associated with each, all vary greatly from version to version. And, equally disconcerting, all but the Kashmiri versions are incomplete. The *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* breaks off after Naravāhanadatta's fifth marriage, *Peruṅkatai* after his first; and whole parts are missing from the middle and end of *Vasudevahiṃḍi.* Only the Kashmiri versions are intact. But they, with their muddled organization and penchant for displacing the frame-story with countless emboxed tales, leave one little sense of assurance that they reflect the ur-text.

It is likely the series of *lambha* in each version has been a favorite target for alteration, usually by the addition or subtraction of tales, to a smaller degree by the modification of stories that were actually present in the ur-text (as best we can tell). The *lambha* organization being basically episodic, it is easy to see how any number of *lambhas* might be inserted in any order, including *lambhas* that never belonged to the original. It may be rash to assume the "original" *lambhas* and their order were of great significance at all to the ur-text. Guṇāḍhya's work may have been as loosely organized as some of its heirs. Still, if one supposes marital adventures were yoked with the theme of imperial conquest, as they are so clearly in

[25] *Harivaṃśapurāṇa* (n. 13 above), p. 95.

[26] On the evidence of the *Kathāsaritsāgara.*

[27] See note 25 above.

Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha and less clearly so in the Kashmiri versions, it is at least plausible to suppose also that there was some more complex sort of artistic logic governing the arrangement of the *lambhas*. Unfortunately, it is a logic we cannot recover from the evidence as it exists. But whatever the original may have been, the narration of a hero's succession of amorous adventures (*lambhas*) has become a minor genre in classical Indian literature, possibly on the model of the *Bṛhatkathā* itself.[28] The *lambha*-organization is, after all, an attractive and useful device for stringing together any number of stories, however disparate they may be.

Elements of story aside, there is significant agreement among versions about three aspects of the treatment or technique. First, all versions except *Peruṅkatai* concur that the central action is narrated as flashback. And, second, it is narrated by Naravāhanadatta himself in the first person, after he has become emperor of Vidyādharas, revealing the events of his past: how he married all his wives and how he conquered the Vidyādhara empire. At first sight the Kashmiri versions seem, like *Peruṅkatai,* to violate both these stipulations. They appear to be told in chronological time, and they appear to have a third-person narrator. In fact, closer analysis (like Lacôte's) reveals the opposite. The Kashmiris have left intact in their muddled reworkings glaring contradictions that reveal the original structure, a source text that was in fact told in flashback. And their modification of a first-person narrative into a third-person narrative is even more transparent: they proclaim that indeed it is Naravāhanadatta telling his own story but in the third person. Finally, third, in all versions except *Peruṅkatai,* Naravāhanadatta's first-person account of his past is introduced by another narrator, a third-person omniscient narrator who tells some story that leads into Naravāhanadatta's narrative. The story varies from version to version, but in all cases its purpose is the same: to introduce the central action. This mixed point of view is a striking feature of texts derived from the *Bṛhatkatha,* and an unusual one too. No wonder that the Kashmiri authors sought to reduce the narration to that of a single, third-person narrator.

So the inventory unfolds for us the probable contents and arrangement of the urtext. Naravāhanadatta is induced on one pretext or another to tell the story of how he became emperor of the Vidyādharas. He begins with the life of his father and the events leading to his own birth, then proceeds on to the narrative he has promised: how he became emperor of Vidyādharas and married all his wives. He talks of his youth only briefly, but with the account of his first love affair, with Madanamañjukā, the narrative becomes rich and detailed. Madanamañjukā is abducted by the lustful Vidyādhara Mānasavega and, soon after, Naravāhanadatta himself by that same celestial. He escapes from the clutches of his captor and falls safely to earth in a foreign land, to begin his long odyssey. He proceeds from one amorous adventure to another, often marrying the heroine of the moment and acquiring in the process greater and greater powers from his wives and their kin. And in the back of Naravāhanadatta's mind all during this lengthy period of wandering is his desire to recover Madanamañjukā, his first and greatest love. This he does finally with his

[28] In fact, in Daṇḍin (*Kāvyādarśa* 1.27) the books of a *kathā* (narrative) are called *lambha*; cited in *Essai*, pp. 221–22. Lacôte speculated that the *Kathā* par excellence behind Daṇḍin's generalizations was Guṇādhya's work (*Essai*, p. 222). Examples of works organized by *lambha* are Vādībhasiṃhasūri's *Gadyācintāmaṇi* and *Kṣatracūdāmaṇi*. This has been carried over into classical Tamil: *Cīvakacintāmaṇi* of Tiruttakkatēvar, based on Vādībhasiṃhasūri's *Kṣatracūdāmaṇi*, is organized by *lampakam*. It is in fact called *maṇanūl*, "The Book of Marriages" (Kamil Zvelebil, *History of Indian Literature: Tamil Literature*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974, p. 137).

Vidyādhara allies as he (now a Vidyādhara himself) conquers the empire of Vidyādharas and captures Madanamañjukā's abductor.

What I have presented here in inventory are the most basic story-elements that most or all of the versions hold in common. They share certain narrative techniques as well as detail about events and characters; but greater detail does not alter the larger picture our inventory presents. And, as I shall suggest in a moment, all the detail in the world, were we lucky enough to have it, might still leave us in ignorance of important aspects of Guṇāḍhya's book. What we have recovered by inventorying the common content is an approximate idea of the materials the *Bṛhatkathā* contained and the manner in which they were arranged. Such results are of value on several levels. They, for example, confirm Lacôte's conclusions in large part and justify his high opinion of the *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* as the most "faithful" version of the lost *Bṛhatkathā*. On a wider horizon, studies of *Bṛhatkathā*'s materials can be useful to comparativists of many kinds, in Indian literary history, for example, or in folkloric studies of motif analysis or of the transmission of tales from East to West. Penzer's edition of Tawney's *Ocean of Story* is a case in point, with its elaborate notes broadly concerned with folklorism. Indeed, most interest in the narrative (*kathā-ākhyāyikā*) literature of ancient India has been concern for *micro-analysis* of particular stories from a comparativist point of view, seeking out recurring motifs, searching for underlying or universal features common to Hindu and Western "folkloric" literature, and pursuing like questions. One finds such modes of analysis, for instance, in the work of Bloomfield, when he dealt with stories or themes or motifs.[29] Bloomfield in fact proposed an "Encyclopaedia of Hindu Fiction," with data to be drawn from the narrative literature of India.[30] In short, in the literary history of Indian narrative, most emphasis has fallen on problems concerned primarily with the *materials* of the texts.

In a still wider arena of study, materials are the staple interest of scholars who use literary sources as data for studies not concerned with literature: any historical study, for example, that calls on particular literary texts for evidence relevant to some historical question whose meaning or significance lies outside the literary work itself; or, an even more common example, the numerous cultural histories of a particular period or locale that draw their data heavily from literary works thought to be relevant in some manner to that period or locale, of the "India According to Kālidāsa" variety.

But materials are not the only aspect of literary work. It is simply that, what most easily and usually comes to mind are the materials of the text and their arrangement. But to limit ourselves to these considerations alone is to fall headlong into what Ronald Crane called "formalism,"

> the disposition to reduce problems of artistic form to questions of "structure" merely, in abstraction from the humanly interesting and moving aspects of works

[29] "On the Art of Entering Another's Body: A Hindu Fiction Motif," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, LVI (1917), pp. 1–43; "The Dohâda or Craving of Pregnant Women: A Motif of Hindu Fiction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, XL (1920), pp. 1–24; "The Fable of the Crow and the Palm-Tree, a Psychic Motif in Hindu Fiction," *American Journal of Philology*, XL (1919), pp. 1–36; and in other papers.

[30] Bloomfield, "On Recurring Psychic Motifs in Hindu Fiction, and the Laugh and Cry Motif," *JAOS*, XXXVI (1917), p. 54. "The more significant or salient traits of these stories—motifs as we may call them—are distributed or rearranged anew in every time and clime of India. . . . Thus any motif may turn up at any time, in any place, and practically in any connection in Hindu fiction and its tributaries" (ibid., p. 57). Bloomfield considered some of his papers (see n. 29 above) as contributions toward that Encyclopaedia.

> upon which their form in the full sense of its peculiar moral and emotional quality essentially depends.[31]

What is "form"? Crane takes the concept from Aristotle.

> In a well-made poem, everything is formed, and hence rendered poetic (whatever it may have been in itself), by virtue simply of being made to do something definite in the poem or to produce a definitely definable effect, however local, which the same materials of language, thought, character-traits, or actions would be incapable of in abstraction from the poem, or the content in the poem, in which they appear.[32a]

Form is

> the shaping cause of any given literary work—the principle which determines for its writer the necessities and opportunities he must consider in composing it,[32b] . . . something over and above and, as a principle, causally distinct from any of the potentialities he or anyone else can attribute in advance to either the materials he has assembled in his mind or the technical devices at his disposal,[32c] . . . that principle, or complex of principles, which gives to the subject-matter the power it has to affect our opinions and emotions in a certain definite way such as would not have been possible had the synthesizing principle been of a different kind.[32d]

The inventory of texts presented above, any similar inventory for that matter, accounts for subject matter alone, in abstraction from the particular form of each work, that is, from the particular set of effects each has upon our opinions and emotions by virtue of its particular structuring of those materials. With Crane's concept of "form," one may explain works not simply materially but also *poetically* (to use Crane's term),[32e] interpreting the materials in terms of their particular functions or effects in the poem in moving our opinions and emotions. For, if the intended purpose of a literary work is largely (though not solely) to produce an emotional and intellectual response in the reader or listener, then criticism must in some way identify the particular responses and find their possible or probable causes within the work. To deal with the materials of any given work *apart from* the particular form one perceives in that work can be misleading, for it assumes that those materials have the same meanings in themselves (outside the work) as they do formed *into* that particular work one is considering. Such an assumption may be false. And such a false assumption has sometimes led to fallacious modes of interpretation in indological studies.

It may be erroneous, for example, to bring to the interpretation of a work materials that exist outside the work and which, it is assumed, are similar to or identical with the materials that exist within the work: for example, to use historical knowledge of Candragupta Maurya or of Kauṭilya or of the *Arthaśāstra* to interpret the *Mudrārākṣasa*. It could well be that the *Mudrārākṣasa* draws literally on historical fact, but we should not assume that. Indeed, one reading of the work gives quite the opposite impression, that it is instead a "problem play" concerned with the human limitations of men in positions of great power, where the effect of the action is to evoke a sense of pity and foreboding for characters who, despite their high station and vast powers, act often out of ignorance, often in blind and ineffectual reaction to events that are sheer accident or to circumstances that are beyond their control. In

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[31] "Principles" (n. 20 above), p. 62.

[32] Crane, *The Language of Criticism and the Structure of Poetry* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1953): (a) p. 153, (b) p. 143, (c) pp. 143f., (d) p. 166, (e) p. 153.

this interpretation, the play is thus quite ahistorical, quite opposite in its effect to what we might expect from "historical" knowledge of Candragupta and Kauṭilya. Indeed, this sort of irony could well be a central point of the artist.

But the reverse mode of interpretation, again based on the same assumption—that is, that one can draw upon the materials of a literary work for "data" that are to exist and function *outside* the work—can be equally fallacious. I have already given examples of this common mode of analysis: works of the "India according to X" genre, or, to use the example of the *Mudrārākṣasa* again, a study that would extract "history" from the *Mudrārākṣasa*. This latter approach is a common one in indology, especially for the study of persons, periods, places, ideas, or the like for which literary texts are among the few sources extant. The fallacy of such a method (as well as the fallacy of the method that brings external data to the interpretation of the work) is *not* that it uses literary works for the interpretation of extra-literary data (or vice versa). Certainly, literary works must have some clear reference to their times (and vice versa) or they would be totally inaccessible to readers. What *is* the fallacy, however, is to study the materials of such works apart from the particular forms in which they are embedded. For it is probable that the literary work, in forming those particular materials according to its shaping cause, has altered or even distorted what meanings those materials might have had before incorporation into the work.

Is it possible to reconstruct the form of the lost *Bṛhatkathā,* then to recover the *Bṛhatkathā* as a literary work, and perceive its materials in terms of their emotional and intellectual functions in the whole? One method would be to find a form shared among various versions: in short, to conduct an inventory of forms (just as we inventoried the materials), in search of that single form common to most or all of the versions. Unfortunately this is quite fruitless, for one could not imagine five works whose forms differed more from one another.

Begin with the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. It advertises at its beginning that the career of Naravāhanadatta, last of the Universal Emperors of Vidyādharas, is to be the central action. But what in fact is presented is only in part concerned with Naravāhanadatta. What we find instead is a skeletal frame-story with frequent and lengthy asides for stories having possible but only marginal (and sometimes completely implausible) connection with the "main" story. "By occasion hereof [the frame-story], many other adventures are intermedled, but rather as Accidents, then intendments," as Spenser[33] says of his *Faerie Queene.* The effect of the whole *Kathāsaritsāgara* is to produce not a sense of development or movement toward some conclusion but rather of repetition, episode upon episode, of particular local and briefly enduring effects produced by the numerous sub-stories emboxed within the whole. The central action recedes into the background,[34] used primarily to string together innumerable subsidiary stories related to the main story by some shared theme however tenuous,

[33] "A Letter of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke . . . to the Right noble, and Valorous, Sir Walter Raleigh" in J. C. Smith & E. de Selincourt (ed.), *Spenser. Poetical Works. Ed. with Critical Notes* (orig. 1912; reprint London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975). In the Introduction de Selincourt remarks that *Faerie Queene* is "a discursive romance. To his 'general intention' and meaning Spenser has kept with sufficient clearness, but that intention is, after all, something apart from the story, and encourages digression" (p. 50).

[34] It is the weak presence of a central action which makes the work so inimical to Western experience and tastes. It also makes *Kathāsaritsāgara* the least useful version for any attempt at reconstructing the whole frame-story, though, ironically, it (along with its Kashmiri cousin *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī*) is the only version of *Bṛhatkathā* to contain a full (though mangled) account of Naravāhanadatta.

some event or emotion or memory in the main story which evokes the telling of a subsidiary story about a parallel or similar or somehow related situation. Or, often, the subsidiary stories are biographies or autobiographies of figures secondary to the central action. And so the whole takes on a tone of "orality," as if it were being told a piece at a time, night after night, each quantum to be narratable within the space of a single sitting and connected to the rest by the meagerly detailed frame of the main story (which, to be remembered over such a considerable period of time, would be best kept simple). The auditor's experience remains all but constant from episode to episode, anticipating not a final conclusion to a developing story but the next episode or subplot or tangential aside. It is the experience of an audience hearing purana recitation, rather than that of readers of novels.

Little need be said of the *Bṛhatkathāmañjarī* here. It is very like its Kashmiri cousin but considerably shorter and quite laconic in style. The *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha,* however, is a remarkable contrast to the Kashmiri versions. Here the central action, much more developed and detailed than in the Kashmiri works, is only rarely interrupted by accessory stories. It opens with a brief survey of the kings of Ujjāyinī, a history we soon find has little to do with the central action, an interesting but conventional narrative centered on Prince Avantivardhana's rapid ascent to the throne of Avanti while still a very young man. The point of this opening narrative is to introduce Naravāhanadatta, emperor of Vidyādharas, into the story. Naravāhanadatta is then cajoled into telling how he became emperor of Vidyādharas and married all his wives. We are thus led into a gradual reconstruction of the past—his father Udayana's life recovered in fragments sprinkled among the main narrative, his own life told in great detail and with only occasional interruption. Unfortunately, only about a quarter of Naravāhanadatta's story survives. What does exist has a certain episodic quality as we move from marriage to marriage, adventure to adventure; but there are also hints of a moral progression in the chief character and those around him. Two themes run through the narrative—Naravāhanadatta's successive marriages and his political adventures—threaded together by a third, his on again-off again search for his first love Madanamañjukā, kidnapped by Mānasavega. Naravāhanadatta must himself become a Vidyādhara, to confront his celestial enemy Mānasavega and his allies and to recover his lost wife. Marriages to Vidyādhara women and political successes with his Vidyādhara allies bring him ultimately those powers. The conclusion of the story is preannounced: Naravāhanadatta will become emperor of all Vidyādharas and recover his wife. But the progression is far from smooth and automatic; Naravāhanadatta does not always rise to his destiny. What we find instead is a certain strain between opposed forces: on the one hand, destiny, guiding the characters in ways not always clearly perceived (by them or us) and sometimes gaining their explicit and conscious participation toward the lofty goal; on the other, human nature with its connotations of limitation and narrowed vision, when we find our hero all too ready at times to enjoy himself with his latest conquest, blind to his long-range goals. The latter especially gives the *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* a sense of human fullness, a naturalism that is appealing to modern readers, in contrast to the many Sanskrit narratives (not just those related to the *Bṛhatkathā*) that tend to a flat, mannered representation of their action (like the *Kathāsaritsāgara*) and often verge on allegory.

Peruṅkatai presents still another contrast, in which a highly manneristic style is wedded to a baroque and expansive narrative, in this case mostly about the reign and amours of King Udayana. The work is a third-person, chronological description of

Udayana's life from his first marriage to Vāsavadattā up to the birth of Naravāhanadatta, then of Naravāhanadatta's first marriage, at which point the text breaks off. An account of the first book alone will give an adequate idea of the form of the whole. Udayana, captive of Pradyota in Ujjāyinī, meets Vāsavadattā, Pradyota's daughter, and the two fall in love. With the assistance of Udayana's minister Yaugandharāyaṇa, working underground in Ujjāyinī, Udayana and Vāsavadattā escape to safety. What is summarized here in two sentences occupies over five thousand lines of Tamil text (and was once even longer; the first thirty-two chapters have perished). Obviously, much of the text serves not to advance the narrative but rather to embroider in numerous ways upon settings and events, Jaina religion, Tamil poetic conventions, and a host of other elements, with its virtuoso display of densely packed, rococo-like embellishment of every character, scene, action. Into this opulent tapestry are woven two parallel themes which run through most of the work: Udayana's consuming love for Vāsavadattā, a love that will lead him to neglect his kingdom; and (introduced in the second book) the theme of the machinations of Udayana's Machiavellian ministers to separate him, if only temporarily, from Vāsavadattā and to force Udayana to act toward his political survival. The themes juxtaposed give the work its emotional form: we, along with the omniscient narrator, know how the minsters have manoeuvred to separate the lovers; the suffering and noble Udayana does not. But alternating with our feelings for his plight is our excitement over the political machinations. Only in the fourth book are these feelings resolved, when Udayana's wife and kingdom are restored, leading ultimately to the birth of Naravāhanadatta in Book V.

Vasudevahiṃḍi is presented to us as a compendium (*saṃgaha*) within the wider framework of the Jaina *guruparaṃparā*,[35] the hagiography of the sixty-three eminent personages (*śalākāpuruṣa*, or *mahāpuruṣa*) of Jainism, in this case of the twenty-second Tīrthaṅkāra Ariṣṭanemi (last but one before Mahāvīra) and of the ninth and last hero-triad (contemporaries of Ariṣṭanemi) Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, Baladeva Balarāma, and Prativāsudeva Jarāsaṃdha. Functioning within this framework is the main story of the text, the wanderings (*hiṃḍi*) of Prince Vasudeva, father of Kṛṣṇa, in the decades before Kṛṣṇa's birth. Only someone familiar with other versions of *Bṛhatkathā* would ever have recognized, embedded in the usual set of Jaina narrative frames, the *Bṛhatkathā* story of Naravāhanadatta. In plot, that part of *Vasudevahiṃḍi* actually concerned with Vasudeva most resembles *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha*: a first-person narrative account by the hero of his life and marriages from the time he left home to a culminating point, in this case his final (and most important) marriages to Rohiṇī and Devakī, mothers of Baladeva and Kṛṣṇa. But in form, *Vasudevahiṃḍi* is quite different from *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* and from the other versions of the *Bṛhatkathā* as well. The succession of marital adventures is highly episodic. Often only the barest bones of narrative describe his meeting with and marriage to a particular heroine. Frequently there is inserted into the running narrative subsidiary material, much in the spirit of the *Kathāsaritsāgara*—generally stories having the most minimal connection with that main narrative. And frequent too in that subsidiary material, as is hardly surprising, are Jaina didactic tales.

Vasudeva himself tells us at the beginning that his narrative is to be of "the pleasures and difficult straits I experienced while wandering about" (*Vasudevahiṃḍi*

[35] *Guruparaṃparāgayaṃ vasudevacariyaṃ ṇāma saṃgahaṃ vannaissaṃ* (*Vasudevahiṃḍi* 1.16).

110.22–23). And this is a fair description of the account, for that is essentially all that happens: he meets and wins over a variety of women (often Vidyādharas), and he has frequent and unpleasant encounters with the minions of Jarāsaṃdha, the Prativāsudeva, who understandably wishes to murder him since he has been warned that Vasudeva's future son (Kṛṣṇa) will slay him (*Vasudevahiṃḍi* 80.22, 248.16–23). And though the particulars may vary from one adventure to the next, there is an overall sameness to the action, a sense of a repeated single theme with only the names and details changed (and this of course within the flow of ever-varying and quite fascinating subsidiary materials on a wide variety of subjects and characters, a veritable compendium of narrative bits in the Jaina tradition). There is no sense of moral progression, only a feeling of cyclic movement, entertaining and fast-paced, culminating in what Alsdorf pointed out is, for its Jaina author, the most important event of the story: the marriages with Rohiṇī and Devakī. The one element that seems to hold all of this material together is, as we are promised at *Vasudevahiṃḍi* 26.13–14, the didactic treatment of not only Vasudeva's adventures but also of most of the rest of the stories found in the text. He will tell us, says the narrator of one of the stories that frames Vasudeva's account, how Vasudeva obtained *saṃyaktva* (perfection), how he practiced *tapas,* and how he obtained the fruits of his *tapas* in another world. And though one has to read between the lines to see progression toward *saṃyaktva,* it is possible that Vasudeva's various experiences are to be seen as forms of *tapas,* that he enjoys the fruits of this *tapas* often in the extra-human geography of the Vidyādharas, and that the story does "end" with his perfection when he marries the mothers-to-be of Kṛṣṇa and Baladeva. Thus the form of *Vasudevahiṃḍi* is—like the form of most Jaina narrative—didactic, instructing us by the numerous examples of correct belief and behavior it presents in the adventures of Vasudeva and the stories interleaved among those adventures.

Now, it is evident that our versions are far from having a common form. But is it possible to find another means for recovering the form of the lost ur-text? Might we, for example, somehow discover and prove that one of the versions has the form that belonged to the *Bṛhatkathā*? Strictly speaking, I think not. There are simply no logical means I can think of to choose among them as they stand. But, if we assume our inventory of materials is accurate, might it be possible to choose the form most "appropriate" to those particular materials? Here again I think one treads on thin logical ice, for there is no direct causal relationship between materials and form. The same story may take radically different forms; and, for that matter, even the same detailed plot may do so. Anyone who has seen two film versions of the same novel, for example, or two films where one is the remake of the other, will have experienced how different the effects of virtually the same plot can be on our opinions and emotions. A subtle shift in emphasis, a different interpretation of a line, the most minor rearrangement of detail can spell the difference between, say, Luis Bunuel's brooding, dark version of Mirabeau's *Diary of a Chambermaid* and the airy, *buffo* version of Jean Renoir.

At best we can only eliminate, if that, *un*likely or *in*appropriate choices in the light of our inventory of materials and their arrangement. But is any of our versions "unlikely" in these terms? We can perhaps label *Vasudevahiṃḍi* and *Peruṅkatai* so—the one for its strong veneer of Jaina didacticism, the other for its clear Jaina leanings and the mold of classical Tamil poetic conventions in which its story is cast. But if we remove these elements from consideration, we still have left forms that are as plausible as those of the other versions: for *Vasudevahiṃḍi*, a terse but episodic

account with frequent asides of an adventuresome and often passive hero whose life is a succession of joys and disasters; for *Peruṅkatai*, a detailed, chronological narrative of the life of Udayana with movement from the misfortune of captivity and loss of kingdom to the stability and bliss of final restoration to his throne and reunion with his beloved Vāsavadattā (and this leading to the happy birth of Naravāhanadatta). Nor, as one might wish to think, can we reject the Kashmiri versions for their "inappropriate" forms. They are fragmented and episodic in that manner of story-emboxed-within-story so familiar to readers of Sanskrit fiction. But that is just the point. The form of the Kashmiri versions is perhaps the most common among narratives in ancient India, all the more reason we should not eliminate it as the possible form of the ur-*Bṛhatkathā*. The *Bṛhatkathāślokasaṃgraha* is the preferred version, at least, by modern tastes; but its unitary, coherent, and tightly structured form is not necessarily that of the ur-text. Budhasvāmin's Naravāhanadatta, for example, is a much more complex and self-contradictory hero than he is in any of the other versions—much more prey to his human limitations, much more uncertain about his destiny. How can we possibly decide that Budhasvāmin's character is an accurate borrowing from the *Bṛhatkathā* and that the Naravāhanadatta found in other versions is an impoverishment?

How for that matter are we to decide that the form of *any* of the extant versions is the form of the original? With five versions that are so clearly different in form, it is evident that at least four of them have modified their source in some manner. They cannot all reflect the original. But how do we know that it is not the case that *all five* have modified their source, chosen forms different from that of the original? We do not know; in fact, it is quite likely that all five have made such changes. For what is most likely to suffer change as a work progresses through different versions (as in the case of the *Bṛhatkathā* or a novel or a famous film)? Not the materials generally and usually not the basic arrangement of those materials, though some changes in either will inevitably occur. It is *form* which changes as the source text is recast into a different emotional mold, reformed subtly or drastically to a new and different set of effects on our opinions and emotions. And it is not difficult to imagine still other forms into which the *Bṛhatkathā*'s materials and plot (as we imagine them to be from our inventory) might have been recast: as an allegory, for example, in the manner of *Faerie Queene*, of the moral transformation of a human into the supra-human; or into a *carita* in the manner of the *Daśakumāracarita*, where the experience of the whole has been fragmented and divided among a number of narrators each with only a partial view of the whole, to produce an effect of cumulative discovery of the full picture, bit by bit, with emphasis shifted from the moral development of a single central character to the complicated and hidden links that tie together the lives of many characters. In short, where it is likely that a text has been "reworked" into a version or retelling or abridgement or the like, efforts to recover the "original" form are doomed to be arbitrary in the absence of considerable agreement among several versions of that original, or in the absence of internal contradictions in the versions (which reveal how they have distorted the ur-text), or in the absence of external evidence telling us directly what the ur-text was like.

Such attempts to reconstruct the form of *Bṛhatkatha* would be futile, by the nature of our evidence and by the very nature of the problem as formulated (its false assumption that materials, or even the arrangement of the materials, determine form). But in these negative conclusions lie important lessons for the study of Indian literary texts and for the uses of Indian literary history. We can see, first, that it is an

empty formalism to deal with the materials of any work apart from what Crane[36] calls those elements that make such materials humanly interesting, the form of the work, in short. To draw up inventories of the materials contained within texts is an example of such formalism, or the frequent tendency in literary histories of India to deal with works mainly in terms of their plots. Secondly (and related to the first point), it is inappropriate, in handling any literary text (whether in comparing it to other literary texts or in using it as data to answer questions that arise from extra-literary interests), to talk of its materials apart from the particular form in which they exist (and to which end they have been formed). If a literary work involves the arranging of various materials according to some shaping principle in order to give those materials a particular effect on our feelings and thinking, then the materials must first be perceived as they exist within those forms, where they have been formed poetically to function for local effect and for the whole.

[36] "Principles" (n. 20 above), p. 62.